

Median salaries of lawyers 6 months after graduation from law school in 1998 varied by type of work, as indicated by table 1.

**Table 1. Median salaries of lawyers 6 months after graduation, 1998**

All graduates .....	\$45,000
<i>Type of work</i>	
Private practice .....	60,000
Business/industry .....	50,000
Academe .....	38,000
Judicial clerkship .....	37,500
Government .....	36,000
Public interest .....	31,000

SOURCE: National Association for Law Placement

Salaries of experienced attorneys vary widely according to the type, size, and location of their employer. Lawyers who own their own practices usually earn less than those who are partners in law firms. Lawyers starting their own practice may need to work part time in other occupations to supplement their income until their practice is well established.

Earnings among judicial workers also vary significantly. According to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court earned \$175,400, and the Associate Justices earned \$167,900. Federal district court judges had salaries of \$136,700 in 1998, as did judges in the Court of Federal Claims and the Court of International Trade; circuit court judges earned \$145,000 a year. Federal judges with limited jurisdiction, such as magistrates and bankruptcy court judges, had salaries of \$125,800.

According to a survey by the National Center for State Courts, annual salaries of associate justices of States' highest courts averaged \$105,100 in 1997, and ranged from about \$77,100 to \$137,300. Salaries of State intermediate appellate court judges averaged \$103,700, and ranged from \$79,400 to \$124,200. Salaries of State judges of general jurisdiction trial courts averaged \$94,000, and ranged from \$72,000 to \$115,300.

Most salaried lawyers and judges are provided health and life insurance, and contributions are made on their behalf to retirement plans. Lawyers who practice independently are only covered if they arrange and pay for such benefits themselves.

### Related Occupations

Legal training is useful in many other occupations. Some of these are arbitrator, mediator, journalist, patent agent, title examiner, legislative assistant, lobbyist, FBI special agent, political office holder, and corporate executive.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information on law schools and a career in law may be obtained from:

☛ American Bar Association, 750 North Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.abanet.org>

Information on the LSAT, the Law School Data Assembly Service, applying to law school, and financial aid for law students may be obtained from:

☛ Law School Admission Council, P.O. Box 40, Newtown, PA 18940. Internet: <http://www.lsac.org>

Information on acquiring a job as a lawyer with the Federal Government may be obtained from the Office of Personnel Management through a telephone-based system. Consult your telephone directory under U.S. Government for a local number or call (912) 757-3000; TDD (912) 744-2299. This number is not toll-free and charges may result. Information also is available from their Internet site: <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>

The requirements for admission to the bar in a particular State or other jurisdiction may also be obtained at the State capital from the clerk of the Supreme Court or the administrator of the State Board of Bar Examiners.

## Paralegals

(O\*NET 28305)

### Significant Points

- While some paralegals train on the job, employers increasingly prefer graduates of postsecondary paralegal training programs.
- Paralegals are projected to rank among the fastest growing occupations in the economy as they increasingly perform many legal tasks formerly carried out by lawyers.
- Stiff competition is expected as the number of graduates of paralegal training programs and others seeking to enter the profession outpaces job growth.

### Nature of the Work

While lawyers assume ultimate responsibility for legal work, they often delegate many of their tasks to paralegals. In fact, paralegals continue to assume a growing range of tasks in the Nation's legal offices and perform many of the same tasks as lawyers. Nevertheless, they are still explicitly prohibited from carrying out duties which are considered to be the practice of law, such as setting legal fees, giving legal advice, and presenting cases in court.

One of a paralegal's most important tasks is helping lawyers prepare for closings, hearings, trials, and corporate meetings. Paralegals investigate the facts of cases and ensure all relevant information is considered. They also identify appropriate laws, judicial decisions, legal articles, and other materials that are relevant to assigned cases. After they analyze and organize the information, paralegals may prepare written reports that attorneys use in determining how cases should be handled. Should attorneys decide to file lawsuits on behalf of clients, paralegals may help prepare the legal arguments, draft pleadings and motions to be filed with the court, obtain affidavits, and assist attorneys during trials. Paralegals also organize and track files of all important case documents and make them available and easily accessible to attorneys.

In addition to this preparatory work, paralegals also perform a number of other vital functions. For example, they help draft contracts, mortgages, separation agreements, and trust instruments. They may also assist in preparing tax returns and planning estates. Some paralegals coordinate the activities of other law office employees and maintain financial records for the office. Various additional tasks may differ, depending on the employer.

Paralegals are found in all types of organizations, but most are employed by law firms, corporate legal departments, and various levels of government. In these organizations, they may work in all areas of the law, including litigation, personal injury, corporate law, criminal law, employee benefits, intellectual property, labor law, and real estate. Within specialties, functions often are broken down further so paralegals may deal with a specific area. For example, paralegals specializing in labor law may deal exclusively with employee benefits.

The duties of paralegals also differ widely based on the type of organization in which they are employed. Paralegals who work for corporations often assist attorneys with employee contracts, shareholder agreements, stock option plans, and employee benefit plans. They may also help prepare and file annual financial reports, maintain corporate minute books and resolutions, and secure loans for

the corporation. Paralegals also occasionally review government regulations to ensure the corporation operates within the law.

The duties of paralegals who work in the public sector usually vary in each agency. In general, they analyze legal material for internal use, maintain reference files, conduct research for attorneys, and collect and analyze evidence for agency hearings. They may then prepare informative or explanatory material on laws, agency regulations, and agency policy for general use by the agency and the public. Paralegals employed in community legal service projects help the poor, the aged, and others in need of legal assistance. They file forms, conduct research, prepare documents, and when authorized by law, may represent clients at administrative hearings.

Paralegals in small and medium-sized law firms usually perform a variety of duties that require a general knowledge of the law. For example, they may research judicial decisions on improper police arrests or help prepare a mortgage contract. Paralegals employed by large law firms, government agencies, and corporations, however, are more likely to specialize in one aspect of the law.

A growing number of paralegals use computers in their work. Computer software packages and the Internet are increasingly used to search legal literature stored in computer databases and on CD-ROM. In litigation involving many supporting documents, paralegals may use computer databases to retrieve, organize, and index various materials. Imaging software allows paralegals to scan documents directly into a database, while billing programs help them to track hours billed to clients. Computer software packages may also be used to perform tax computations and explore the consequences of possible tax strategies for clients.

### Working Conditions

Paralegals employed by corporations and government usually work a standard 40-hour week. Although most paralegals work year round, some are temporarily employed during busy times of the year, then released when the workload diminishes. Paralegals who work for law firms sometimes work very long hours when they are under pressure to meet deadlines. Some law firms reward such loyalty with bonuses and additional time off.

These workers handle many routine assignments, particularly when they are inexperienced. As they gain experience, Paralegals usually assume more varied tasks with additional responsibility. Paralegals do most of their work at desks in offices and law libraries. Occasionally, they travel to gather information and perform other duties.

### Employment

Paralegals held about 136,000 jobs in 1998. Private law firms employed the vast majority; most of the remainder worked for

corporate legal departments and the various levels of government. Within the Federal Government, the Department of Justice is the largest employer, followed by the Departments of Treasury and Defense, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Other employers include State and local governments, publicly funded legal service centers, banks, real estate development companies, and insurance companies. A small number of paralegals own their own businesses and work as freelance legal assistants, contracting their services to attorneys or corporate legal departments.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

There are several ways to become a paralegal. Employers usually require formal paralegal training obtained through associate or bachelor's degree programs or through a certification program. Increasingly, employers prefer graduates of 4-year paralegal programs or college graduates who have completed paralegal certificate programs. Some employers prefer to train paralegals on the job, hiring college graduates with no legal experience or promoting experienced legal secretaries. Other entrants have experience in a technical field that is useful to law firms, such as a background in tax preparation for tax and estate practice or nursing or health administration for personal injury practice.

Over 800 formal paralegal training programs are offered by 4-year colleges and universities, law schools, community and junior colleges, business schools, and proprietary schools. There are currently 232 programs approved by the American Bar Association (ABA). Although this approval is neither required nor sought by many programs, graduation from an ABA-approved program can enhance one's employment opportunities. The requirements for admission to these programs vary. Some require certain college courses or a bachelor's degree; others accept high school graduates or those with legal experience; and a few schools require standardized tests and personal interviews.

Paralegal programs include 2-year associate's degree programs, 4-year bachelor's degree programs, and certificate programs that take only a few months to complete. Many certificate programs only require a high school diploma or GED for admission. Programs typically include courses on law and legal research techniques, in addition to courses covering specialized areas of law, such as real estate, estate planning and probate, litigation, family law, contracts, and criminal law. Many employers prefer applicants with specialized training.

The quality of paralegal training programs varies; the better programs usually include job placement. Programs increasingly include courses introducing students to the legal applications of computers. Many paralegal training programs include an internship in which students gain practical experience by working for several months in a law office, corporate legal department, or government agency. Experience gained in internships is an asset when seeking a job after graduation. Prospective students should examine the experiences of recent graduates before enrolling in those programs.

Although most employers do not require certification, earning a voluntary certificate from a professional society may offer advantages in the labor market. The National Association of Legal Assistants, for example, has established standards for certification requiring various combinations of education and experience. Paralegals who meet these standards are eligible to take a 2-day examination, given three times each year at several regional testing centers. Those who pass this examination may use the designation Certified Legal Assistant (CLA). In addition, the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam, established in 1996 and administered through the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, offers professional recognition to paralegals with a bachelor's degree and at least 2 years of experience. Those who pass this examination may use the designation Registered Paralegal (RP).

Paralegals must be able to document and present their findings and opinions to their supervising attorney. They need to understand legal terminology and have good research and investigative skills.



*Most paralegals are employed by law firms, corporate legal departments, and various levels of government.*

Familiarity with the operation and applications of computers in legal research and litigation support is also increasingly important. Paralegals should stay informed of new developments in the laws that affect their area of practice. Participation in continuing legal education seminars allows paralegals to maintain and expand their legal knowledge.

Because paralegals frequently deal with the public, they should be courteous and uphold the ethical standards of the legal profession. The National Association of Legal Assistants, the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, and a few States have established ethical guidelines for paralegals to follow.

Paralegals are usually given more responsibilities and less supervision as they gain work experience. Experienced paralegals who work in large law firms, corporate legal departments, and government agencies may supervise and delegate assignments to other paralegals and clerical staff. Advancement opportunities also include promotion to managerial and other law-related positions within the firm or corporate legal department. However, some paralegals find it easier to move to another law firm when seeking increased responsibility or advancement.

### Job Outlook

Paralegals are projected to rank among the fastest growing occupations in the economy through 2008. However, stiff competition for jobs should continue as the number of graduates of paralegal training programs and others seeking to enter the profession outpaces job growth. Employment growth stems from law firms and other employers with legal staffs increasingly hiring paralegals to lower the cost and increase the availability and efficiency of legal services. The majority of job openings for paralegals in the future will be new jobs created by rapid employment growth; other job openings will arise as people leave the occupation.

Private law firms will continue to be the largest employers of paralegals, but a growing array of other organizations, such as corporate legal departments, insurance companies, real estate and title insurance firms, and banks will also continue to hire paralegals. These organizations are expected to grow as an increasing population requires additional legal services, especially in areas such as intellectual property, health care, international, elder, sexual harassment, and environmental law. The growth of prepaid legal plans should also contribute to the demand for legal services. Paralegal employment in these organizations is expected to increase as paralegals are assigned a growing range of tasks and are increasingly employed in small and medium-sized establishments.

Job opportunities for paralegals will expand in the public sector as well. Community legal service programs, which provide assistance to the poor, aged, minorities, and middle-income families, will employ additional paralegals to minimize expenses and serve the most people. Federal, State, and local government agencies, consumer organizations, and the courts should also continue to hire paralegals in increasing numbers.

To a limited extent, paralegal jobs are affected by the business cycle. During recessions, demand declines for some discretionary legal services, such as planning estates, drafting wills, and handling real estate transactions. Corporations are less inclined to initiate litigation when falling sales and profits lead to fiscal belt tightening. As a result, full-time paralegals employed in offices adversely affected by a recession may be laid off or have their work hours reduced. On the other hand, during recessions, corporations and individuals are more likely to face other problems that require legal assistance, such as bankruptcies, foreclosures, and divorces. Paralegals, who provide

many of the same legal services as lawyers at a lower cost, tend to fare relatively better in difficult economic conditions.

### Earnings

Earnings of paralegals vary greatly. Salaries depend on education, training, experience, type and size of employer, and the geographic location of the job. In general, paralegals who work for large law firms or in large metropolitan areas earn more than those who work for smaller firms or in less populated regions. In 1998, full-time, wage and salary paralegals had median annual earnings of \$32,760. The middle 50 percent earned between \$26,240 and 40,960. The top 10 percent earned more than \$50,290, while the bottom 10 percent earned less than \$21,770. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of paralegals in 1997 are shown below:

Federal government .....	\$43,900
Local government .....	32,200
Legal services .....	30,300

According to the National Association of Legal Assistants, paralegals had an average salary of \$34,000 in 1997. In addition to a salary, many paralegals received a bonus, which averaged about \$2,100. According to the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, starting salaries of paralegals with 1 year or less experience averaged \$30,700 in 1997.

### Related Occupations

Several other occupations call for a specialized understanding of the law and the legal system, but do not require the extensive training of a lawyer. These include abstractors, claim examiners, compliance and enforcement inspectors, occupational safety and health workers, patent agents, and title examiners.

### Sources of Additional Information

General information on a career as a paralegal can be obtained from:  
 Standing Committee on Legal Assistants, American Bar Association, 750 North Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.abanet.org/legalassts>

For information on the Certified Legal Assistant exam, schools that offer training programs in a specific State, and standards and guidelines for paralegals, contact:

National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc., 1516 South Boston St., Suite 200, Tulsa, OK 74119. Internet: <http://www.nala.org>

Information on a career as a paralegal, schools that offer training programs, job postings for paralegals, the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam, and local paralegal associations can be obtained from:

National Federation of Paralegal Associations, P.O. Box 33108, Kansas City, MO 64114. Internet: <http://www.paralegals.org>

Information on paralegal training programs, including the pamphlet "How to Choose a Paralegal Education Program," may be obtained from:

American Association for Paralegal Education, P.O. Box 40244, Overland Park, KS 66204. Internet: <http://www.aafpe.org>

Information on acquiring a job as a paralegal specialist with the Federal Government may be obtained from the Office of Personnel Management through a telephone-based system. Consult your telephone directory under U.S. Government for a local number or call (912) 757-3000; TDD (912) 744-2299. This call is not toll-free, and charges may result. Information also is available from their Internet site: <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>